

The Good old way :

Or, A VINDICATION

of some Important Scripture-Truths,
and all who Preach them from the Im-
putation of NOVELTY.

In a Letter to the Rev'd. Mr. *John
Malcom*, occasioned by his late Pam-
phlet, entitled *Personal Persuasion no
foundation for Religious Obedience*.

¶ Acts. XVII. 11. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica
in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and search-
ed the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

¶ The supreme Judge by which all Controversies of Religion are to be
determined, and all decrees of Councils, Opinions of Ancient Writ-
ers, Doctrines of Men, and private Spirits are to be Examined and
in whose sentence we are to rest. can be no other but the Holy Spirit
speaking in the holy scripture. Confession of Faith. ch. 1. §. 10.

¶ God alone is Lord of the Conscience, and hath left it free from the
Doctrines and Commandments of men, which are in any thing con-
trary to his Word, or beside it, in Matters of faith or worship, so
that to believe such Doctrines, or to Obey such Commands out of
Conscience, is to betray the Liberty of Conscience, and the requir-
ing of an implicit Faith and absolute and blind obedience, is to de-
stroy Liberty of Conscience and reason also. ch. 20. §. 2.

¶ All Synods or Councils since the Apostles times whether general
or particular; may err; and many have erred. And therefore they
are not to be made the Rule of Faith or Practice; but to be used as an
Help in both. chap. 31. §. 4.

By the Belfast Society.



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REV'D Sir,

WE are heartily sorry, that you have laid us under an unhappy Necessity of doing justice, in so publick a manner to our Reputation; which you have treated with so much contempt and reproach (in your printed pamphlet entituled, *Personal Persuasion no Foundation for Religious Obedience: or some friendly Reflections &c.*) as tends to make us vile and odious in the eyes of our People and Rev'd Brethren; to afford the Common Enemies of our Holy Religion matter of derision and triumph; and by this means to blast our Ministry, and render it unsuccessful with Respect to the ends of it's sacred Institution, more dear to us than our Lives and all our Temporal Comforts. We have that opinion of your Integrity as to believe you uncapable of forming so wicked a design: we charge it on your Pamphlet, as it's Natural Tendency. We make all possible Charitable Allowances for your mistaking the true state of the case, your Credulity, and misguided Zeal for truth: to all which we impute your charging us with opinions which we disclaim, and Misunderstanding those we hold for plain scriptural Doctrines.

The substance of your charge against us may be collected out of the following passages of your preface p. 4 " a sett of men
" by preaching and printing, pretend to
" give

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 “ give new light to the world by putting
 “ *Personal Persuasion* in the room of Church-
 “ *Government and Discipline*. Ibid. “ some
 “ Men have setup for new Light (whence they
 “ have it I cannot tell) that has never appea-
 “ red in the Church of Christ before. Ibid.
 “ I hope our Brethren who have left us
 “ may be at length brought to see that Con-
 “ science hath no such Supremacy as to thrust
 “ out the Government and Discipline of the
 “ Church of Christ.

p. 5. “ Do not condemn your pious
 “ and learned Fathers and all the Generati-
 “ ons of godly Ministers and people from this
 “ time upward to the Ascension of Christ
 “ (who never left in record to posterity such
 “ Doctrine as now is in vogue amongst you)
 “ till with great deliberation and careful
 “ search of the scriptures, you find they were
 “ wrong. Ibid. “ I wish our Brethren who
 “ have so suddenly separated from us would
 “ let us know what they would be at, by
 “ giving us a scheme of their new Doctrine,
 “ that we may understand whether they be
 “ for any Government in the Church or none,
 “ whether *Presbyterian*, or *Episcopal* or *Independ-*
 “ *ent*, or whatever else they please.

You are pleased to introduce this Charge,
 by your remarks upon the abuse of the Press
 by *Atheists*, *Antitrinitarians*, *Socinians*, *Qua-*
kers, *Arminians*, and all the rabble of erroneous
 sects for carrying on their own base designs, by

which your unwary Reader may be led to think that you design'd to rank us amongst *them* : You have such opportunities of knowing the falshood of that charge, that we can't believe that you intended to load us with so vile a calumny ; but the connection of your paper gives us just ground to call upon you to explain your self.

You advance nothing to support your charge against us, but a Sermon, *Preach'd and Publish'd by Mr. Abernethy*, one of our number, entitled, *Religious Obedience founded on personal persuasion*. The Doctrine contain'd in this sermon you have Misunderstood : drawn false Consequences from it, disown'd by him and us : and put these Consequences, of your own drawing, upon us ; contrary to the exprefs words of the sermon, and the most obvious, evident sense of which they are capable, in the judgment of any unprejudic'd Reader. Before we lay open these mistakes it will be proper to offer some General Remarks upon the Charge you thought fit to bring against us, before the world.

We being sensible of many difficulties arising from our Personal Circumstances, as well as the Common Condition of the Brethren of our *Persuasion* in this Kingdom which have hamper'd us in our pursuit after Learning, could not think of a better Expedient for promoting Christian Knowledge and for *stirring up the Gift of God in us*, than by joining in a
voluntary

voluntary SOCIETY; where we communicate to one another our Christian Experience, the fruits of our Reading, Meditation and Prayer, and confer upon those points, which we judge to be the most necessary for rendering us faithful in the service of our great Lord and Master. We do with thankful Acknowledgments to God (to whose sovereign Grace we ascribe all our success) rejoice in those satisfactory confirming views of his precious Truths, which we have found to be the happy fruits of such Endeavours: And the Testimony of our Consciences gives us a comfortable support under all the reproaches we have met with in the prosecution of so plain a Duty:

Belfast, being the Center wherein we ordinarily meet, where there is a weekly Lecture attended by one of the most judicious Auditories of our *Persuasion* in this Province, we thought it might promote Edification and encourage our selves to attend the better, to have a Sermon Preach'd at each of our meetings upon some select Subjects, after the laudable Example of those pious and Learned Divines in *London* who Preached the *Lectures* at the *Morning Exercise*; And that of our own Fathers in this Kingdom who kept a monthly meeting at *Antrim*, wherein they had Edifying Discourses both Publick and Private: and not altogether unlike the Prophecyings in *England* in *Queen Elizabeth's* time, which

were suppress'd by a spirit of Persecution, to the great discouragement of Piety and useful Learning.

The unnatural Contentions and Animosities among Christians, being one great Cause of the lamentable decay of Christian Piety, we made choice of such Subjects as we believed most conducive to revive and encourage the Vigorous exercise of that noble Grace of Charity, *the bond of perfectness.*

In our Sermons upon these subjects, the Principal Doctrines we taught were these,
 " That the H. Scriptures of the old and
 " New Testament, are the Infallible Word
 " of God and the perfect Rule of Faith and
 " Manners. That the Reformation from
 " Popery is the Cause of God, sufficiently
 " proved by these glorious Divine Truths,
 " which we rejoyce to find contain'd in the
 " publick Confessions of the Reformed
 " Churches, and particularly in our WEST-
 " MINSTER-CONFESSION; wherein we
 " have a most valuable Treasure of Gospel-
 " Truth. That Infallibility is justly disclaim-
 " ed by all Protestant Churches; That there-
 " fore all the Decisions of Councils and Sy-
 " nodes in Matters of Religion ought to be
 " examined according to the Word of God;
 " And that every private Christian hath an
 " Essential Unalienable Right of Judging for
 " himself whether they be right or wrong;
 " That no Church ought to act towards her
 " Members

Members, or towards her Sister Church, as if
 they were Infallible ; That Christ Jesus, as
 Head of the Church, hath the Uncommuni-
 cable Prerogative of making Laws to bind
 the Consciences of his Subjects in Mat-
 ters of Religion and Eternal Salvation :
 That by his Decisions alone they are to
 stand or fall : That he alone hath settled
 the terms of Communion which are con-
 tain'd in the Holy Scriptures ; And that it
 is unwarrantable for **ANY CHURCH** or
SOCIETY to make *New Terms* of Com-
 munion. That the terms of Communion set-
 tled by our **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, are the **True**
 and **Only Center of Unity** in the Christian
 Church. That a close adherence to them
 is the most effectual way to promote Char-
 ity and Love among all true Christians;
 and a departing from them the way to
 promote and perpetuate Schism. That it
 is the **Duty of Christians** to *forbear one*
another in Love, and not to urge a rigid
 Uniformity in points of *doubtful disputation*,
 and that are not the plain Essentials of Re-
 ligion. And to help Christians to judge of
FUNDAMENTAL Articles, we have
 taught that every Fundamental Article
 of Faith hath two Essential Characters
 viz, 1. That it be so *clearly* propounded
 and opened in some place of scripture or
 other, that not only the Learned, but the
 Unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary
 means

“ means, may all attain unto a sufficient understanding of it. 2ly That the Holy Scriptures make it *necessary* to salvation. As for the Doctrine taught in Mr. *Abernethy's* Sermon, we need not, in this short abstract take notice of it.

And now *Sir*, we verily believe you cannot impeach *any* of *these* doctrines of *Novelty*: They appear to us, to be the pure and precious truths of JESUS CHRIST, and the most healing and seasonable Doctrines that could be taught in this age of Division and Contention: some of them are the Essential principles of PROTESTANTISM, the denial whereof will inevitably lead us into a relapse into Popery; and all of them open the way of *peace on earth and Good will towards Men*. If these Doctrines must be branded with the name of *New Doctrines* and teaching them, be called a *setting up for New light that never appear'd in the Church before*, we shall heartily bewail it, and cannot but express our concern, that you have given such an handle to your unwary reader for passing that severe and unjust censure upon them.

The whole of your reflections upon Mr. *Abernethy's* sermon are founded on **Three** mistakes. The First is, that you do not apprehend the true Meaning of the Title of the Sermon, and of the Doctrine prosecuted in it: for by that proposition, *That Religious Obedience is founded on personal persuasion is meant* no more

more than this, that Religious Obedience necessarily implies Personal Persuasion as Essential to it: For where there is no persuasion there is no Faith; And whatsoever is not of Faith is sin.

The whole explication given of *Personal Persuasion*, and all the arguments used in the Sermon for proving the Doctrine, show this to be the obvious Meaning of it, and particularly these words p. 20 "In matters of the highest importance we cannot be accepted without *Persuasion*; to say we could, would be in effect to say we may be saved by a meer profession and a course of External Actions; that is, by Hypocrisy. Had you duly adverted to this you might have spared the greatest part of your remarks: which evidently tho' very unjustly suppose, that *Persuasion*, is set up not as an essential qualification of acceptable obedience to the revealed will of God, but as a Rule Independent on, Nay, and opposite to the scriptures themselves. Then you would have had no occasion for saying, that we make a Bible of our Conscience (p. 9.) Nor for that unfriendly Reflection you cast upon his doctrine p. 10. "But by no means can it [conscience] be justly called the foundation of our obedience, or that our obedience is founded on it, unless we fall in with the cursed Socinians, who tell us plainly that *Humane reason is our Rule and guide even in points that directly relate to* eternal

“ *eternal salvation*, and with them our Author
 “ plainly agrees. “ Pray, Sir, can you ima-
 gine that teaching the necessity of faith, and
 persuasion in order to make our obedience
 truly Religious and acceptable, to God (in
 which sense alone it is called the foundation
 of our obedience) is a *Socinian* doctrine? or,
 does our asserting the necessity of a *full*
persuasion of God’s word being the only Rule
 of Faith infer that we set up Reason as
 another Rule? we cannot but express a just
 detestation of our being so unjustly branded
 with *Socinianism*; and heartliiy wish you may
 see the evil of this way of treating your
 Brethren.

A Second Mistake in your *reflections*,
 is, that you insinuate the Doctrine taught
 in the sermon to endanger the safety of the
 Civil Government and to encourage Treason
 and Rebellion; while you tell us of many
 “ who are persuaded that King George is
 “ not our Lawful King and many are per-
 “ suaded that the Pretender is their Lawful
 “ King &c: And that upon this Principle
 “ we may conclude that those who were
 “ taken in the Rebellion at *Dumblain* or *Pre-*
 “ *ston*, were unjustly dealt with, and their
 “ consciences trampled upon, when some of
 “ them were Executed and some of them sent
 abroad. Words cannot be more exprefs to
 show how inconsequential and groundless
 this sort of reasoning is, than these following
 passages of the Sermon. p. 35. “ But this
 „ does

“ does not in the least impair the Magistra-
 “ te’s just power, who has still enough refer-
 “ ved for his care, even the whole extent of
 “ Humane Actions, which regard the Publick
 “ Peace. Under that consideration alone
 “ they are proper for his Cognizance, And
 “ he hath such an Authority as no Pleas of
 “ *Conscience can supersede*. Our Doctrine then
 is plainly this, when any man is convicted
 of Treason, Rebellion, or any Crime against the
 Safety and Peace of the State, if he plead Con-
 science, Let God Almighty Judge of that Plea,
 but the Magistrate may and ought to Punish
 him notwithstanding, by vertue of a Power he
 has, which NO PLEA of that nature can
 Superse.

Your Third Mistake is founded upon your
 apprehending, that the Doctrine of that Sermon
 prostitutes the Communion of the Church to
 Adulterers, Incestuous persons, the Vilest and
 most Profane, and those who err in *Fundamen-*
tal and Essential Articles of Faith; and if all
 or any of these shou’d plead to be receiv’d in-
 to the Communion of the Church and tell
 her, they are *fully Persuaded in their own minds*,
 that their Vile Errors are *sound* Principles, and
 their *Immoralities* are *lawful*, the Church must
 Receive them. You put the Case. p. 22. “ That
 such demand to be received into full Com-
 “ munion of the Church; And then
 “ you put the Question, how can our Bro-
 “ ther refuse, according to his own Principles,
 “ to grant ’em all Privileges. B 2 There

There are two plain passages in the Sermon; Which shew to a demonstration that the Author of it (and all of us are of the same mind) maintains the quite contray Doctrine to what you Alledge. The *first* is in these words *pa*: 36. "I do not speak of that which
 " is not only the right, but the indispenfible
 " duty of Christians to separate from the
 " fellowship of those who are called Brethren
 " and walk disorderly, that is, as the Apostle
 " describes them, 1 Cor. 5. 11. *Fornicators, Cove-*
 " *tous, Idolaters, Railers, Drunkards, Extortioners;*
 " or, Who in any other like Instances notori-
 " ously transgress the Plain and Essential Pre-
 " cepts of Jesus Christ; for the Apostle ex-
 " horts the *Corinthians* to *put away the Incestu-*
 " *ous person from among them*; and Asserts
 " their right (Which is the common Right of
 " all CHRISTIAN CHURCHES) so far to *Judge, 'em*
 " *that are within.* Let this page be compared
 with the following words page. 37.

Because the Rules of the Gospel direct us to separate from those who are openly Scandalous and Profligate in their lives, doing those things which the *Common Sense* of mankind condemns, therefore we may also Separate from such as Differ from us, in things wherein the sincerity of Christians permit 'em to Differ.

From these Passages it is evident, that we maintain it to be the unquestionable Duty and Right of every Christian Church to Deny the

Tokens

Tokens of Christian Communion, and not to eat with these very persons, whom you think our Principles oblige us to Receive into full Communion, and yet this is no Usurpation of an Authority over the Consciences of those Persons; for we leave their Consciences to their great Judge; and in the mean time the Church follows the light of her own Conscience and full *Persuasion*, in Doing her Duty in that, which the greatest Assertors of Church-power have look'd upon to be the *highest Instance* of it: and therefore it is very unjust to represent us as enemies to the Government and Discipline of the Church of Christ, and to alledge we *thrust it out*, and put *Personal Persuasion* in the room of it. Indeed we think, that 'tis very agreeable to Charity, that those points wherein *the reason of Men and the sincerity of Christians permit them to differ*, and which therefore cannot be Essentials and Vitals of Religion, shou'd not occasion any Breach, Alienation of Affection or Excommunicating Canons; In these things there ought to be a Christian Forbearance amongst good Men and true Believers; this Doctrine is largely prosecuted thro' that Sermon, and we are confident 'tis the Doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, and has been taught us by *our pious and Learned Fathers*, whose memory you shou'd not abuse so far, as to represent our Doctrine to be opposite to 'em all, *from this time upwards to the Ascension of Christ*. We pretend not to such a general acquaintance

with all the generations of Godly Ministers and people who Lived since the early date you mention, to be able to pronounce what their uninterrupted sentiments have been in that peremptory way you do, yet presume it were no hard matter to set before you a cloud of witnesses, who all Espoused the very Principles, you wou'd represent as Dangerous and Wicked. But we shall Content our selves with the single Testimony of such, as we find Collected to your hand by that Learned and faithful Minister of the Gospel the Revd. Mr. George Gillespie, In his *English popish Ceremonies*. " 'Tis " certain says he p : 9. That Human Laws " as they come from Men, and in respect of " any force or autho rity which Men can " give them, have no Power to bind the Con- " science. *Neque enim cum hominibus sed cum* " *uno Deo negotium est conscientiis nostris.* Saith " Calvin. Over our Souls and Consciences, " *nemini quicquam juris nisi Deo* saith Ti- " len. From Hierome's distinction, that a King *præst* " *nolentibus*, but a Bishop *Volentibus*. Marcus An- " *tonius de Dominis* well concludeth *Volenti-* " *bus gregi præesse, excludit omnem jurisdictionem &* " *potestatem imperativam ac coactivam & solan-* " *significat directivam, ubi viz. in libertate sub-* " *diti est & parere & non parere, ita ut qu-* " *præst nihil habeat quo nolentem parere adigat ac-* " *parendum.* This poin the provethin that Chap- " ter at length, where he disputeth both again " temporal and spiritual coactive Jurisdiction

in the Church. If it be demanded, to what purpose serveth then the enacting of Ecclesiastical Laws, since they have not in them any power to bind the Conscience? I Answer. The use and end for which Ecclesiastical Laws do serve, is. 1. For the plain discovery of such things as the Law of God or Nature do require of us, so that Law which of it self hath power to bind, cometh from the Priests and Ministers of the Lord neither AUTOKRATORIKOS nor NOMOTHETIKOS but *Declarative*, Mal. 2. 7. 2. For declaring to us what is fittest in such things as are in their own Nature indifferent, and neither enforced by the Law of God nor Nature, and which part should be followed in these things, as most convenient. The Laws of the Church then are appointed to let us see the necessity of the first kind of things, and what is expedient in the other kind of things, and therefore they are more properly called Directions, Instructions, Admonitions, than Laws. For I speak of Ecclesiastical Laws *qua tales*, that is, as they are the constitutions of Men who are set over us, thus considered, they have only *vim dirigendi & monendi*. It is said of the Apostles, that they were constitute *doctrina Christi testes, non novae Doctrinae legislatores*. And the same may be said of all the Ministers of the Gospel, when Discipline is taken in with Doctrine.

We hope Sir, you and we, and all our Rev'd. Brethren, are upon the Main, of that same

same mind, and that there is no material Difference among us ; and therefore we declare it to be our fervent desire to live in Love and Constant Communion with them, if they will permit us, of which we can't entertain any doubt, and we do not understand what you can mean when you charge us with *leaving 'em, and separating from 'em* ; the usual acceptation of those terms signifies our setting up a Separate Communion ; which is so far from being true, that the *Searcher of hearts* knows that we have not the least *Tho't* or Inclination to do it : we heartily wish that you had comply'd with the earnest desire made to you by some of us with all possible importunity ; viz that you shou'd first privately hold a Brotherly Conference with us upon these heads in order to our mutual satisfaction, you know this was done the——day of *May*, and why you declin'd so Christian a Duty, and *very soon after* attack'd us from the Press, is what your self can best account for. we are

Rev'd Sir, your affectionate Brethren and fellow-labourers in the Work of the Gospel.

F I N I S.